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Rafale Deal Still Not Final, But in Advanced Stage

Still to Go! DAC didn't discuss deal but cleared a pending chapter of new acquisition policy

Contrary to reports that the Rafale fighter deal with France has been sealed, defence minister Manohar Parrikar has said that negotiations are still on and the intention is to close the contract at the earliest, maintaining an earlier stance on progress in the acquisition process.

Parrikar, who returned from a tour to China, said that the deal would only be deemed clear till it was sent to the cabinet for approval -a prerequisite for defence contracts of such high value. Also, the high powered defence acquisition committee (DAC), which met on Thursday, did not discuss the contract but cleared a pending chapter of the new acquisition policy.

“I can tell you this much that the deal is in quite an advanced stage and we intend to close it quite soon. Cannot still say that negotiations are totally cleared until we sign the deal or at least the deal is forwarded to Cabinet for approval,” Parrikar said.

On queries about a BJP online campaign had described the deal as finalised, the defence minister quipped that perhaps some media stories were taken too seriously by them.

As first reported by ET in January, India has been closing in on final details of the fighter deal at an expected price of Rs. 60,000 crore.

While most of the tricky areas around the mega contract -including offsets -have been resolved, issues on pricing remain, including on the support package for the fighters that will provide spares and service for the next 5-10 years.

The price is likely to be finalised around the Indian demand for Rs. 60,000 crore, with an offsets package that will boost domestic industry but a compromise could be made by the Indian side on the weapons package as well as support contract to bring down initial acquisition cost. The deal could be sealed within a month, sources involved in the process said.

Meanwhile, Parrikar said that during his recent visit to China, it was clearly conveyed that all terrorists should be treated equally harshly, referring to the blocking of India's attempts to designate Masood Azhar as a terrorist that was blocked by Beijing. “I expressed very clearly that there cannot be differentiation in terrorists. All terrorists are the same and they should be dealt with the same principle, including the issue they had obstructed at the UN,” he said.

Parrikar also said that Beijing had raised the issue of India agreeing to sign a military logistics sharing agreement with the US but said that it was not very ‘intensity’. He also said that India and China are working towards signing a new defence cooperation protocol later this year.

The Statesman
22 Apr, 2016

War games to deal with nuclear attack: Army

A strike formation of the Army today undertook drills to counter any tactical nuclear attack on its mechanised unit, as part of the war games being conducted in deserts of Rajasthan.

The simulation came as about 30,000 soldiers took part in a major exercise ‘Shatrujeet’, led by the elite Mathura-based Strike Corp, in desert area of Mahajan firing range where it is honing its skills to counter Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) warfare among others.

The aim of CBRN simulation was to validate the army's response in case it faces a tactical nuclear attack.

“Our policy has been always that we will never use nuclear weapons first. But if we are attacked, we need to gather ourselves and fight through it. The simulation is about doing exactly that,” an Army source said.

The aim is to practise the capability to strike deep into the enemy territory in an integrated air-land battle environment.

The exercise is in the last phase and next week on 22 April, Army Chief Dalbir Singh Suhag is likely to visit to review the exercise. As part of its training and operational preparedness, various drills involved in CBRN warfare were practiced by the troops including use of Individual Protective Equipment (IPE) and fighting in a CBRN contaminated area.

Troops underwent simulations of chemical and nuclear attacks and practiced measures to mitigate effect on persons and operations.

A tactical nuclear attack was also simulated on one of its mechanised formations spearheading the attack, the sources said.

Business Standard
22 Apr, 2016

Reliance Defence seeks licence for equipment mfg in SEZs

Reliance Defence has sought the Commerce Ministry's approval to manufacture defence equipment at its special economic zones (SEZs) in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

"The proposals of Reliance Defence Ltd for grant of industrial licences for manufacturing of defence products...Is placed before the BoA for a decision," the Commerce Ministry said in a note.

An inter-ministerial Board of Approval (BoA), chaired by Commerce Secretary Rita Teotia, will consider these requests on April 28.

Different arms of the Reliance Defence Ltd, including Reliance SED Ltd and Reliance Land Systems, have sought industrial licences to manufacture different items like amphibious vehicles for military use, all types of ammunition and fuses, small arms, heavy weapons and electronic warfare systems.

Its two SEZ units are in Pithampur, Dhar (Madhya Pradesh) and Mihan, Nagpur (Maharashtra).

In its comments, the Department of Defence Production has recommended these proposals, subject to standard terms and conditions of licensing and the extant FDI policy guidelines applicable to the defence sector.

Maharashtra government has also recommended the proposals but has put conditions like 80 per cent of recruitment to be done locally, the agenda note said.

The Tribune
22 Apr, 2016

India, China agree to set up DGMO-level hotline

Parrikar punctures BJP's premature announcement on Rafale deal

India and China have agreed to set up a hotline at the level of Director-General Military Operations (DGMO) and have additional border meeting points for troop formations on either side of the contentious 3,488-km Line of Actual Control (LAC), the defacto boundary between the two Asian neighbours.

Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar, who returned from a three-day trip to China last night, said on Monday the new hotlines and border meeting points will be a reality soon. The drafts of the

agreement have been exchanged. Parrikar was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the Naval Commanders Conference here in New Delhi.

At present India and China have five border personnel meeting points all along the Himalayas, where formation commanders on either side discuss local irksome issues. Parrikar, who had led to a high-level delegation to China (April 17 to April 20) termed the talks in China as 'frank and positive'. The two sides discussed renewal of the existing Memorandum of Understanding on defence that was first signed in 2006.

The intention to maintain peace along the LAC was discussed in detail, Parrikar said, adding that "our argument is that an accepted principle on the LAC will be better".

"We raised all issues, including the LAC. The LAC issue is pending for decades and it cannot be done in days,"the Defence Minister said. He said the issue of China using its veto powers in the UN Security Council on disallowing a ban on Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM) chief Maulana Masood Azhar was also raised.

Replying to a question, he said the Chinese side raised the issue of India and US agreeing in principle to sign the Logistics Exchange Memorandum Agreement (LEMOA). "We have clarified that India takes autonomous decisions based on its own strategic and security needs."

Meanwhile, Parrikar punctured the premature announcement on signing the Rafale fighter deal with French company Dassault Aviation. Parrikar said: "The deal is in advanced stage and we intend to close it very soon. However, we cannot say the deal is done till it's signed or at least sent to the Cabinet for its approval".

Last night the BJP announced on its facebook page that the deal had been done.

On Friday the Ministry of Defence had completed the price fixation of 7.89 billion euros to buy 36 Rafale jets.

The Asian Age
22 Apr, 2016

US: China need not fear missile defence

China has no need to be worried about US plans to deploy a new anti-missile system in South Korea to protect it from North Korea, a senior US diplomat said on a visit to Beijing, adding North Korea had shown no interest in diplomacy.

The United States and South Korea have begun talks on possible deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system after North Korea tested its fourth nuclear bomb on January 6 and launched a long-range rocket on February 7, both in defiance of UN resolutions, but China firmly opposes the move.

"The fact is that North Korea presents a very serious missile threat to the Korean peninsula," Sung Kim, the US special envoy for North Korea, told reporters.

"And we, together with South Korea, have decided that we should take appropriate defensive measures to protect ourselves against this missile threat from North Korea."

In South China Sea, US flexes military muscle

By Michael S Schmidt

Beijing could react to the Pentagon's moves by taking more aggressive actions

Over the last week in Asia, Defence Secretary Ash Carter has visited 2 aircraft carriers, revealed new military agreements with India and the Philippines, and generally signalled that the Obama administration has decided to lean more heavily on military power to counter China's territorial ambitions in the region.

But the newly muscular approach on display during Carter's tour represents a gamble. While it sends a message that the United States will work with its allies to challenge Beijing's expanding presence in the disputed South China Sea, it also plays into fears within the Chinese leadership about US efforts to halt China's rise.

That may mean that the more the Pentagon steps up in the region, the more China may feel it needs to accelerate its military buildup, including the construction of new islands equipped with radar and airstrips in contested waters. With a mix of showmanship and concrete initiatives during a 6-day visit to India and the Philippines, Carter left little doubt that the United States intended both to strengthen alliances and move more hardware and troops here to counter China's growing military reach.

Last week, he rode a helicopter to a symbol of American power projection in the Pacific, a Nimitz-class nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, as it cruised through the South China Sea near waters claimed by the Chinese. Before visiting the carrier John C Stennis, he marked the end of 11 days of military exercises between the United States and the Philippines and said some US troops would stay behind "to contribute to regional security and stability." He also said the United States had begun joint patrols of the South China Sea with the Philippine navy and would soon do the same with the country's air force.

Earlier in the week, Carter toured an Indian aircraft carrier, the first time a US defence secretary had boarded such a ship, and said the United States would help India upgrade its carriers. He also revealed a new logistics agreement and said the 2 nations would work together on other military technologies.

Together, the measures announced by Carter hint at a potential US military resurgence in a part of the world where China believes it is destined to surpass the United States in influence. The Obama administration seems to be betting that China will back off rather than continue making moves that lead its neighbours to embrace the US military.

More than once during the last week, Carter cited China's actions as the driving force behind tensions in the region and, implicitly, the reason for its neighbours' increased engagement with the Pentagon.

Below deck on the John C Stennis, he said China should not see the carrier's presence as a provocation. "We have been here for decade upon decade. The only reason that question even comes up is because of what has gone on over the last year, and that's a question of Chinese behaviour," he said. "What's not new is an American carrier in this region. What's new is the context and tension that exists, which we want to reduce." But some analysts warn that China could react to the Pentagon's moves by taking more aggressive actions, challenging America's commitment to the region in a high-profile game of chicken and raising the risk of a military conflict.

The Chinese have been closely watching Carter's tour, which had included a stop in Beijing before it was abruptly scrubbed from the schedule a few weeks ago. In a late-night statement on Thursday, the Chinese Defence Ministry accused the United States of reverting to a "Cold War mentality" and said the Chinese military would "pay close attention to the situation and resolutely defend China's territorial sovereignty and maritime interests."

Last week, China also disclosed that its most senior uniformed military commander had visited the disputed Spratly Islands, which appeared intended to signal Beijing's resolve in the South China Sea, most of which it considers Chinese territory.

The Obama administration has declined to describe its approach toward China as a revival of "containment," the Cold War strategy aimed at preventing the spread of communism. Instead, Carter said the new military initiatives in the region were consistent with long-standing American policy to work closely with countries that share its interests.

"America's policy continues to be one valued on principles of peaceful resolutions of disputes, lawful settlement of things like territorial disputes like the South China Sea, or anywhere else, freedom of navigation, freedom of commerce," he said. "These are all things the United States stands for."

"Now countries who don't stand for those things, who don't stand with those things, are going to end up isolating themselves," he added. "That will be self-isolation, not isolation by us."

For decades, neither India nor the Philippines was particularly interested in military cooperation with the US. As a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, India has been suspicious of alliances with other countries, particularly large world powers. And the Philippines expelled US forces in the early 1990s, ending a military presence that began with the United States' capture of the islands from Spain in 1898.

Policy shift

But both countries have grown wary of China's rising military profile - more wary than they are of the United States. The initiatives that Carter announced with India were largely symbolic but could signal greater cooperation in the future, like joint patrols in the South China Sea and the sale of heavy weaponry and other equipment. In a significant policy shift, India is already in talks with Japan, a US ally, to upgrade civilian infrastructure in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, an Indian archipelago seen as a potential strategic asset in efforts to counter Chinese naval expansion.

A sweeping 10-year deal with the Philippines, approved by the nation's Supreme Court in January, will allow US forces to return to the country and build military facilities and assign personnel, planes and ships to existing Philippine bases. Carter announced that more than 200 US pilots and crew members, as well as six aircraft and three helicopters, involved in the joint exercises would remain in the country.

The developments represent a setback for President Xi Jinping of China, who has overseen the acceleration of Beijing's buildup in the South China Sea and could be accused of needlessly drawing the United States back into the region.

But analysts in China said the Obama administration's initiatives were unlikely to achieve its goal of persuading Xi to back off. Instead, they could heighten fears in the Chinese leadership that Washington is using Beijing's territorial claims in the South China Sea as an excuse to encircle China and halt its global rise. China has already objected to or expressed concern about American moves in several countries around its periphery. The United States has opened talks with South Korea about deploying a missile defence system, condoned Japan's efforts to allow its armed forces to undertake overseas combat missions and proposed closer military ties with Australia and Vietnam.

Su Hao, a professor of international relations at China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing, said that it was "crystal clear" to China that Carter's visits to India and the Philippines were part of Washington's effort to "contain China by using the South China Sea dispute as an entry point." "China sees its actions in the South China Seas as legitimate in protecting its own sovereignty and integrity," he added. "China will not just change its behaviours or deployment plan simply because of the Americans."

Deccan Herald
22 Apr, 2016

China exporting military drones

Beijing: China has exported military drones to more than 10 countries in deals worth hundreds of millions of dollars, and plans to sell unmanned craft capable of launching laser-guided bombs.

Chinese drones "have bigger payloads, which means they can carry more weapons" than their competitors, Shi Wen, chief drone designer at the China Academy of Aerospace Aerodynamics said.

The drones are named Cai Hong (Rainbow) with the bestselling CH-3 capable of firing missiles 10 km from a target and staying in the air for more than 10 hours, the report said. "One of our clients in Africa uses each of its CH-3s about 100 hours on average each month," Shi said.

Pakistan likely a buyer

China has leapfrogged both France and Germany to become the third-largest source of major arms globally according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

SIPRI's February report added that Chinese weapons chiefly went to other Asian countries, with Pakistan the main recipient.

Deccan Herald
22 Apr, 2016

Xi Jinping gets new title of 'commander in chief'

Beijing: Chinese state media unveiled a new title for President Xi Jinping calling him "commander in chief" of the country's new joint forces battle command centre, as he seeks to consolidate power over the military.

State-run Xinhua news agency and state broadcaster CCTV both carried reports in English and Chinese referring to Xi by the new description for the first time after he visited the command centre on Wednesday.

As well as president, Xi is general secretary of the Communist Party - the position from which he derives his power - and also chairman of the Central Military Commission.

Since taking office Xi has sought to increase his authority over the People's Liberation Army, which is technically the armed force of the Communist Party rather than the Chinese state.

Xi donned fatigues for what appeared to be the first time for the visit, although his garb did not carry any rank insignia. He has generally worn a plain black uniform for formal military occasions such as a giant parade in Beijing last year.

Iran's new rocket is nuke-friendly

Built with North Korean tech, it is capable of delivering N-warheads

Iran has test-fired a new space rocket, built with North Korean technology, which could be used to deliver nuclear warheads. The Simorgh space rocket was fired on Tuesday from a secret Iranian missile base. According to reports, the rocket did not put any satellite into orbit and the launch may not have been a success. US State Department official John Kirby told the Washington Beacon he was unable to confirm a missile launch from Iran.

“Obviously we’re watching this as best we can. Certainly if it’s true and we’re talking about a ballistic missile launch or the testing of ballistic missile technologies, that’s obviously of concern to us. It’s not consistent, as we said before, with the Security Council resolution.” The rocket is believed to be based on North Korean technology and it is feared it is capable of delivering a nuclear warhead. Earlier this month, the Iranian regime released pictures of its newly purchased S-300 air defence system. The weapon, known as the Grumble, was sold to Tehran by Russia. The Iranian regime also wants to buy the Sukhoi SU-30 fighter from Moscow. Speaking at a military parade, President Hassan Rouhani said: “Our military, political and economic power is not directed against neighbouring countries and the countries of the Islamic world.

When Baghdad was threatened by terrorists, the Islamic Republic of Iran responded to the call of the people, the army and the Iraqi government to defend Baghdad and the holy places.” Republican Senator Tom Cotton from Arkansas said: “An Iranian Simorgh space launch The Simorgh space rocket was fired from a secret Iranian missile base. vehicle test would be a provocation of the highest order and shows Iran’s true intentions. The intelligence community has said publicly that this [space launch vehicle] technology would aid an Iranian [intercontinental ballistic missile] program.

And the only reason one develops ICBMs is the delivery of nuclear weapons.” President Barack Obama is travelling to the Middle East on Thursday to meet officials from six Arab nations to discuss regional security issues and the threat posed by ISIS. The meetings in Riyadh on Thursday are meant to build on a similar summit convened last year at Camp David, the American president’s Maryland retreat.

They reflect an effort by the White House to reassure and coordinate with important but wary Mideast allies that oppose Obama's outreach to Iran and US policy toward the grinding civil war in Syria. The summit with the US-allied countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council follows bilateral talks that Obama held with Saudi King Salman on Wednesday shortly after arriving in the kingdom. Besides Saudi Arabia, the GCC includes the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain. The summit meeting will include three sessions. One is aimed at fostering regional stability and another at counterterrorism efforts including efforts to defeat al-Qaida and ISIS.

A third session will focus on Iran, which Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states see as a destabilising rival in the region.

China to launch 'core module' for space station around 2018

China will launch a "core module" for its first space station sometime around 2018, a senior official told the state-run Xinhua news agency on Thursday, part of a plan to have a permanent manned space station in service around 2022.

Advancing China's space program is a priority for Beijing, with President Xi Jinping calling for the country to establish itself as a space power, and apart from its civilian ambitions Beijing has tested anti-satellite missiles.

China insists its space program is for peaceful purposes, but the U.S. Defense Department has highlighted its increasing space capabilities, saying it was pursuing activities aimed to prevent adversaries from using space-based assets in a crisis.

The "core module" for the space station would be called the "Tianhe-1", the Chinese word for galaxy or Milky Way, Wang Zhongyang, spokesman for the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, told Xinhua.

"Two space labs will be launched later and dock with the core module, Tianhe-1," he said. "The construction of the space station is expected to finish in 2022."

It gave no details of what the "core module" would consist.

"If the International Space Station, which has extended its service, is retired by 2024, China's new space station will be the only operational one in outer space," Wang added.

In a manned space mission in 2013, three Chinese astronauts spent 15 days in orbit and docked with an experimental space laboratory, the Tiangong (Heavenly Palace) 1.

This year, China will launch the Tiangong 2 and Shenzhou 11 spacecraft, which will carry two astronauts and dock with Tiangong 2, Xinhua added.

Next year, China's first cargo ship, Tianzhou 1, will attempt to dock with Tiangong 2, it said.

China also plans a space telescope similar to the Hubble Space Telescope, which will "be on a separate space unit and share orbit alongside the space station", Wang added.

Xinhua, in a separate report, said China was also working on its own reusable rocket technologies and has already built a prototype model. "The experiment has laid solid foundation for the realization of reusable rockets in the country," an unnamed source told Xinhua.

China has been moving to develop its space program for military, commercial and scientific purposes, but is still playing catch-up to established space powers the United States and Russia.

China's Jade Rabbit moon rover landed on the moon in late 2013 to great national fanfare, but soon began experiencing severe technical difficulties. The Jade Rabbit and the Chang'e 3 probe that carried it there marked the first "soft landing" on the moon since 1976. Both the United States and the Soviet Union had accomplished the feat earlier.----Reuters

Tech allows movement of limbs using thoughts

By Sandeep Rai

Five years after Ian Burkhart, now 24, met with a freak diving accident that left him paralysed below the chest, a US research team headed by an Indian scientist has developed a technology that lets him control his limbs using just his “thoughts“.

The remarkable development was achieved by researchers at the Battelle Memorial Institute in Ohio in the US, in a clinical study in collaboration with the Ohio State University (OSU). Neurosurgeons at OSU surgically implanted a computer chip that enables messages to travel from Burkhart's brain to his limbs, bypassing the damaged spinal cord. This has helped him regain some use of his fingers, hand and wrist.

Much of the credit for this landmark medical process has gone to Meerut's Gaurav Sharma, lead investigator on the project. Sharma was schooled at St Thomas English Medium School and St Mary's Academy in the city and NIT Surathkal, before getting a Masters and PhD in the US. His parents still live in Meerut. His father V K Sharma retired from a public sector bank. A US-based researcher hailing from Meerut has developed a technology that allows movement of limbs just using one's thoughts. He is part of a team of Ohio researchers who have applied the technology successfully on Ian Burkhart, a quadriplegic.

Gaurav Sharma, 38, also one of the inventors of the neuroprosthetic technology named NeuroLife, told TOI, “As Ian thinks about moving his hand, the chip records brain signals and our algorithms decode his intent. The signals are then routed as electrical pulses to a sleeve around Ian's arm that stimulates muscles to enable the desired hand movement in real-time.“

The scientist added, “Our next step is to make the algorithms and hardware more robust so that patients can take it home with them and use it in their everyday lives.“

Dave Friedenberg, algorithms and data analysis lead for NeuroLife at Battelle, said, “The difference is that the connection is made outside of his body using technology, instead of inside his body via the spinal cord.“

speaking of his experience, Burkhart said, “Before my accident, I had taken it for granted that I could have so much control over my hand. So while training for this project, I had to break down my thought processes to help the computer learn. The most exhausting part was blocking out everything else in my brain and focusing on just that one movement.“

He added, “The work we're doing is part of a bigger problem that could benefit a lot of other people. I'm a piece of this puzzle, and I'm glad to be a part of it.“